

Electoral College

The Electoral College process is part of the original design of the U.S. Constitution. Each State is allocated a number of Electors equal to the number of its U.S. Senators (always 2) plus the number of its U.S. Representatives (which may change each decade according to the size of each State's population as determined in the Census). California has 55 electoral votes.

The political parties (or independent candidates) in each State submit to the State's chief elections official a list of individuals pledged to their candidate for president and equal in number to the State's electoral vote. In California, each party determines its own method for selecting electors. In the Democratic Party, each congressional nominee and each US Senate nominee (determined by the last two elections) designates one elector whose names are filed with the Secretary of State by October 1st of the presidential election year. In the Republican Party, the nominees for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Treasurer, Controller, Attorney General, Secretary of State, United States Senators (again, going back two elections) the Senate and Assembly Republican leaders, all elected officers of the Republican state central committee, the national committeeman and committeewoman, the president of the Republican county central committee chairmen's organization and the chair or president of each Republican volunteer organization officially recognized by the state central committee act as electors. No incumbent Senators, congressional representatives or persons holding an office of trust or profit of the US can serve as electors. American Independent electors are selected at the party's nominating convention, as are those of the Libertarian, Natural Law, and Peace and Freedom parties, who further specify a 50/50 ratio of men and women.

On the Tuesday following the first Monday of November in years divisible by four, the people in each State cast their ballots for the party slate of Electors representing their choice for President and Vice President (although as a matter of practice, general election ballots normally say "Electors for" each set of candidates rather than list the individual Electors on each slate).

On the Monday following the second Wednesday of December (as established in federal law) each State's Electors meet in their respective State capitals and cast their electoral votes-one for President and one for Vice President

Whichever party slate wins the most popular votes in the State becomes that State's Electors-so that, in effect, whichever presidential ticket gets the most popular votes in a State wins all the Electors of that State. [The two exceptions to this are Maine and Nebraska where two Electors are chosen by statewide popular vote and the remainder by the popular vote within each Congressional district].

In order to prevent Electors from voting only for "favorite sons" of their home State, at least one of their votes must be for a person from outside their State (though this is seldom a problem since the parties have consistently nominated presidential and vice presidential candidates from different States).

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The electoral votes are then sealed and transmitted from each State to the President of the Senate who, on the following January 6th, opens and reads them before both houses of the Congress.

The candidate for president with the most electoral votes, provided that it is an absolute majority (one over half of the total), is declared president. Similarly, the vice presidential candidate with the absolute majority of electoral votes is declared vice president. A total of 270 electoral votes are needed to win.

In the event no one obtains an absolute majority of electoral votes for president, the U.S. House of Representatives (as the chamber closest to the people) selects the president from among the top three contenders with each State casting only one vote and an absolute majority of the States being required to elect. Similarly, if no one obtains an absolute majority for vice president, then the U.S. Senate makes the selection from among the top two contenders for that office. At noon on January 20, the duly elected president and vice president are sworn into office.

Under the Electoral College system, we do not elect the President and Vice President through a direct nation-wide vote. The Presidential election is decided by the combined results of 51 State elections (in this context, the term "State" includes DC). Your vote helps decide which candidate receives your State's electoral votes. It is possible that an elector could ignore the results of the popular vote, but that occurs very rarely.

The founders of the nation devised the Electoral College system as part of their plan to share power between the States and the national government. Under the Federal system adopted in the Constitution, the nation-wide popular vote has no legal significance. As a result, it is possible that the electoral votes awarded on the basis of State elections could produce a different result than the nation-wide popular vote. Nevertheless, the individual citizen's vote is important to the outcome of each State election.

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